

Minutes of the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission

October 3, 2011 - 6:00 P.M. – 344 Broadway, City Hall Annex/McCusker Center, 2nd Floor

Commission Members Present: Nancy Goodwin, *Chair*; Tony Hsiao, *Vice Chair*; Carole Perrault, Charles Redmon, *Members*; Monika Pauli, *Alternate*

Commission Members Absent: Lestra Litchfield, *Member*; Siobhan McMahon, Sue-Ellen Myers, *Alternates*

Staff: Eiliesh Tuffy

Members of the Public: See attached sign-in sheet

With a quorum present, Ms. Goodwin called the meeting to order at 6:03 P.M.

Public Hearings: Alterations to Designated Properties

MC-3968: 51 Amory Street, by Christian Galvao. Replace windows, add new doors and remove chimney.

The 1880, 2-story gable-front cottage is situated on the corner of Amory Street and King Place. King Place is an unaccepted street according to the City of Cambridge. The rear ell where work is proposed is minimally visible from Amory Street.

The owner said the replacement windows were to be 2-over-2 clad-wood windows with true divided lites. He preferred true divided lites to simulated because he felt the latter look too fake. The existing, single-pane wood windows are in poor condition and he also wanted to have double glazed windows.

The removal of the 20”x20” brick chimney was discussed. The owner wants to install a wood-burning stove and the existing chimney is not adequate for that purpose. When asked why the new chimney would not also be brick, the owner said the system uses a metal chimney but he would consider creating a false brick chimney if the Commission preferred. He showed a few material samples of brick veneers.

There were no questions from the public.
Comments were received from the public.

Marilee Meyer of 10 Dana Street said that personally she did not like the idea of painting the metal chimney pipe black. The Commission said that, should a fake chimney be constructed, it might be difficult to work out the brick detail at the corners. Mr. Hsiao said that in some ways the contemporary chimney is a sign of the modern upgrades occurring on the interior and that he would prefer the galvanized metal finish. Ms. Perrault raised a concern about the loss of the brick chimney in this traditional cottage style house, saying she would not deny the metal chimney but her preference is for brick.

Mr. Hsiao moved to accept the application as submitted with the following recommendations:

- Consider using an all-wood window rather than one with exterior cladding
- Leave the galvanized chimney pipe unpainted

Mr. Redmon seconded the motion, which passed 5-0.

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Determination of Procedure: Alterations to Designated Properties

MC-3975: 99 Prospect Street, by Christ the King Presbyterian Church. Install freestanding sign with internal illumination.

The proposed sign cabinet would be located on the grounds of the historic church, which was originally designed by architect Alexander Esty and constructed in 1851. Later additions and were made to the church in 1880 and 1927 by architects Thomas Silloway and Allen & Collens respectively. The church building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1982, which triggers a binding review on behalf of the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission. This is Esty's oldest surviving building in Cambridge and 1 of only 3 surviving Esty-designed churches in the city (the other 2 are the Old Cambridge Baptist Church/Jose Mateo Ballet School, and the rear chapel of the Cambridgeport Baptist Church).

The installation of the sign along the front property line requires a variance from the Board of Zoning Appeals. Ms. Goodwin mentioned that illuminated signs are not permitted in this Zoning district, but that the Commission would consider the proposal for lighting pending BZA approval.

The project team explained that the lights would be LEDs and the design of the aluminum cabinet consisted of opaque polymer push-through letters that would be modestly illuminated. This was preferred to an external flood light, which was thought to have the potential to reflect more light and potentially be glaring.

While some of the Commission members felt the design to be very elegant, others felt the sign looked too industrial and wished for it to look softer.

When asked if the existing signage mounted on the front of the church (next to the front doors) would remain, the pastor said that signage would be used only sporadically for special services. Mr. Redmon suggested using a dark background with white lettering for that sign.

Questions were accepted from the public.

Marilee Meyer of 10 Dana Street said she would be delighted to see the white sign by the door go away and agree a darker background would be better. She said that she liked the concept for the new freestanding sign and the contemporary materials. Ms. Meyer asked if the metal would be the same color as the existing light bollards. The architect said they would be selecting a slightly warmer toned grey.

There was some discussion about placement of the sign and whether installation parallel to or perpendicular to the street would be better. All parties agreed that an installation parallel to the street seemed more appropriate.

The Commission began deliberations for the case.

Ms. Perrault had concerns about the appropriateness of the proposed materials, citing the granite sign and ADA ramp that was approved by the Commission for the Jose Mateo property. She felt the granite was a more natural material, even with the use of metal lettering in that case. She also pointed out that, given this property's National Register designation, she was concerned about approving an illuminated sign.

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Ms. Pauli had concerns about the craftsmanship of the sign cabinet, wondering if the metal seams would be visible.

It was decided that a meeting of the Architects Committee on site, with a sign cabinet mock-up available for viewing, would be beneficial to the decision-making process.

It was also recognized that this could be a precedent-setting decision that could open the flood gates to subsequent illuminated signs, and that only the highest quality design would be considered.

Mr. Redmon made a motion to continue the hearing until a meeting of the Architects Committee could be scheduled to view:

- a sample mock-up of the height and placement of the sign cabinet
- material samples
- the illumination of the proposed cabinet design

Mr. Hsiao seconded the motion, which passed 5-0.

MC-3976: 24 Maple Ave., by 24 Maple Ave. Condo Association. Install a new wood perimeter fence.

Staff presented the case, which was brought to the Historical Commission's attention by the city's Inspectional Services Department (ISD) as a permit violation. The fence, which is already installed at the property, exceeds 6 feet in some locations which requires a building permit. In addition, the fence was not presented for review by the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District for review prior to installation. The owners were informed that ISD had received a complaint about the fence. This was brought before the Commission as a 10-Day notice to expedite the review process while also allowing 10 days for public comment after the Commission meeting.

In addition to Mid Cambridge designation, the property also falls within the boundaries of the Maple Avenue National Register District, which means the Commission has binding review authority over changes to the building, structures on the lot, fences, etc. The role of the Commission in this case is to review the fence for its appropriateness within the district and, if found to be inappropriate, rule against its installation.

The perimeter fence is a solid, wood stockade along the rear property line with a maximum height of 8 feet in that location. The run along the north property line steps down in height from 6 feet at the rear to 3 feet near the front sidewalk.

The lots on Maple Avenue have a high point near the front curb with the grade falling off considerably towards the rear of the lots. When viewed from the back side of the block along Fayette Street, it is clear that some lots on Maple have a higher grade at the rear which is shored up by a retaining wall. Six-foot fences installed on lots with that condition appear much greater in height than the one installed at 24 Maple Ave., due to the considerable discrepancy in grade from lot-to-lot.

Mr. Redmon asked if the property owners had considered the more transparent "good neighbor" design, rather than the completely solid 8-foot design. The owners said it seemed appropriate given the very large lot size and that they were also trying to keep the price down.

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When asked why they chose such a tall fence, the owners said they had hoped to create a high wall of vegetation at the rear of the lot by allowing climbing vines or roses to grow up the fence.

The Commission asked whether the 24 Maple Ave. owners had discussed the fence with neighbors prior to its installation. They said the neighbors at 26 Maple liked the fence, but no discussion with other neighbors took place. Photos of the previous fence were presented, which showed an open chain-link fence along the perimeter of the property that was 6 feet at the rear of the property and 4 feet along the north property line.

The Commission members said that, given the much greater perceived height of some other rear fences along Maple Avenue – due to the irregular grade variations – they did not see a problem with the fence.

There were no questions or comments from the public.

Mr. Hsiao made a motion that, in the context of the irregular grading along the rear lot lines on Maple Avenue, the installed fence was not incongruous with the district and could be approved pending any feedback from abutters requesting a public hearing. Ms. Pauli seconded the motion, which passed 5-0.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:20pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Eiliesh Tuffy
Preservation Administrator

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Members of the Public Who Signed Attendance Sheet 10/3/11

Christian Galvao	128 Magazine St., Cambridge, MA 02139
Margaret McMahon	14 Highland Ave., Cambridge, MA 02139
Richard Downs	27 Pemberton Street, Cambridge, MA 02140
Michael Kyes	72 Green Street, Reading, MA 01867
Marilee Meyer	10 Dana Street, Cambridge, MA 02138
Bill Sullivan	24A Maple Ave., Cambridge, MA 02139
Laura Zimmerman	24 Maple Ave., Cambridge, MA 02139
Larry Peterson	24 Maple Ave., Cambridge, MA 02139